

Alone by faintlystrange

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, F/M, Getting Together, Hurt/Comfort, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Implied/Referenced Homophobia, Introspection, M/M, Multi, Nightmares, Panic Attacks, Polyamory, kind of

Language: English

Characters: Jonathan Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington

Relationships: Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington, Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-11-13

Updated: 2017-11-13

Packaged: 2022-04-02 14:49:08

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,702

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

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Alone

As a child, Steve Harrington was rarely alone.

His parents weren't caring in the way that some kids parents were. They didn't show much physical affection, no casual pats on the back or gentle kisses to his hair. But they were always there. They ate dinner together every night, his mother at one end of the table and his father at the other. There was no dinner chatter, just the empty sounds of their forks and knives scraping across their plates. His mother would pull up his covers once he was in bed and smooth the sides down until they were creased correctly, but she wouldn't read him bedtime stories or sit with him until he fell asleep. It was always a short, "Good night, Steve," and then the darkness.

He wasn't ever really alone at school either. He had his friends. Tommy, Carol, other kids with wealthy parents who only ever hung out together because they already knew each other from Saturday night dress-up dinners and stuffy holiday office functions. He always had someone to sit with him at lunch, always had a partner during games in P.E., and someone was always willing to lend him a pencil if he forgot his at home.

As Steve grew older, things started to change. He still had Tommy and Carol, he still had his other friends and his girlfriends and his admirers, but as he started high school he wasn't sure if he still had his parents. They were around less and less, his father on business trips and his mother at her groups and societies and clubs and things he didn't understand. Then one night at parent-teacher conferences he caught his dad in the boys locker room with his hand up Sarah M.'s mom's skirt. His dad made eye contact with him, and Steve ran. They'd never spoken of it, but Steve was used to how things worked in his house. Don't ask questions, don't talk to each other, don't express emotions. Just do your business and get good grades. So that's what he tried to do. But school was hard enough for him before Will went missing, and afterwards he wasn't convinced how much school even mattered. Near death experiences have a habit of making a person question the validity of their entire existence.

After all that, Steve came out on the other side with nothing. He'd lost the people that he'd ignorantly called his friends, he'd lost Nancy (and Jonathan), and his parents were too far away at this point for him to consider their almost constant absence a loss. He was a senior in high school with horrible grades, hardly anything on his resume, and no college applications, and he was spiraling. He could feel it.

Steve Harrington was used to being lonely, but he wasn't used to being alone.

He would sit at home most Friday nights, too exhausted by playing catch-up in school to even consider going to a lame party where he'd probably stand in the corner watching his old friends have fun until bitterness ate at him from the inside and ultimately sent him home. He tried to work on college applications, but the words blurred on the page in front of him until he threw his notebook across the room in frustration. He would pace, sit, stare at the wall. He would try to sleep, but violent nightmares about one of the kids, or Nancy, or Jonathan, or *him* getting viciously mauled by a demogorgon would cause him to jolt from sleep, breathing heavily with an acrid taste in his mouth. Sometimes he would be doing absolutely nothing, just reading or doing homework, and then this oppressive weight would settle on his chest and he would start to have trouble breathing. He'd panic, thinking he was having a heart attack, or dying, and the worse the panic got, the less the air was able to fight its way into his lungs. He'd spend hours like that, alone on the floor of his bedroom, struggling to breathe, weightless and detached from reality. Steve didn't know what was happening to him, and he couldn't tell anyone about it. There was no one to tell. So he kept on, days passing aching slowly, nothing changing. He was so goddamn lonely.

And then it was holiday break. Steve's father was off somewhere tropical with his "friend." He'd told Steve two days ago that he wouldn't be home for Christmas, as he packed up his bag for work. He didn't even make eye contact. His mother was at her sister's in Indianapolis, and Steve hadn't wanted to go, so she'd left him. She knew about the mistress, and he knew about it, but of course she

wasn't going to leave his father. What would the neighbors think? He would be alone for three weeks, over the holidays, and he had nothing to do. The kids all had their own family traditions, and he couldn't go to Nancy's anymore because...well because. He couldn't just sit at home by himself, because then he would start thinking, so on Christmas Eve, Steve went for a drive.

He maneuvered the car mindlessly through the streets, winding through quiet neighborhoods. At some point he had been going in circles for long enough that he wasn't entirely aware of where he was. He didn't think he was that far from his house, but he couldn't be sure. Small towns were bigger in the dark. His ears buzzed.

Steve drove past a house with a big Christmas tree in the front windows, sparkling with lights. A man was standing next to the tree with a mug in his hand, staring out into the neighborhood. Steve slowed down. As he watched, a woman came up from behind the man and tucked her chin on his shoulder, giving him a kiss on the cheek. Two small children started running in circles around the tree, until the man put down his mug and scooped one of them up. His mouth was wide open with joy. Steve's vision grew blurry.

He stepped on the gas before they noticed him, speeding away through the trees, his breath caught in his chest. He urged the car faster, as if he could outrun what he knew was coming. He was panting, his head light and fuzzy, and he just couldn't seem to get enough air. He took a few more mindless sharp turns through the streets before pulling over to the side and stopping the car with a sudden jolt. He fumbled with the keys and unlocked the door, throwing it open. A gust of unforgiving December wind hit him and he jerked back, desperately trying to breathe. His nails were digging into his palms and his eyes were squeezed shut. The only thought running through his head was that he didn't want to die there, he did *not* want to die there. No matter how hard he tried to calm down, his heart kept racing. Spots were sparking behind his eyelids. His head was swimming. He heard footsteps. They got louder as they approached the car, and someone was yelling, but he couldn't make out the words.

Then someone was inches away from him, and a soft hand was sweeping across his cheek.

“Steve!” Nancy yelled, and that was the last thing he heard before he succumbed to the blackness.

* * *

When Steve woke up he was on an unfamiliar couch. There was a lumpy pillow tucked underneath his head and a blanket on his legs. He wasn’t wearing shoes. Someone had taken off his shoes. He tried to sit up, then groaned. He was almost as sore as when Billy had beaten him up. Ok, it wasn’t that bad, but it still felt like someone had kicked him repeatedly in the head. It was like his brain was trying to beat its way out of his skull.

“He’s awake,” a familiar voice whispered. There was a scurry of movement, and then some more hushed talking.

Steve opened his eyes. He was in the Byers’ living room. He’d expected harsh lights, but it was soothingly dark. He sat up slowly, breathing harshly through his teeth as his head throbbed, and froze when he noticed Jonathan and Nancy sitting across from him. Jonathan was looking at him with wide eyes, as if he couldn’t believe Steve was there, and Nancy’s expression was hard to read. He swung his legs around with some effort and sat up.

“Um,” he said quietly, surprised by the hoarseness of his own voice. “How did I get here?” Nancy and Jonathan looked at each other.

“You don’t remember?” Nancy asked softly. He didn’t like the way she was talking to him. Like she was afraid to spook him.

“I remember going out for a drive,” Steve said slowly, “and then...” He paused.

“And then what?” Jonathan prompted gently.

Steve hesitated. It was coming back to him. Should he tell them about everything? Here they were, sitting here in front of him, clearly trying to help. But he didn’t want to burden them. He wasn’t their problem. And here he was disrupting their Christmas Eve and -

“Steve,” Nancy’s firm tone interrupted his thoughts. “You can tell us

anything. You believe that, right? I know we haven't been here for you this past month, and for that you can't imagine how sorry we are. Truly. It's just been a whirlwind trying to get Will adjusted back to things and helping the kids recover and patching up Joyce's house. But that's not an excuse. We should have been there for you."

"But we're here now," Jonathan added in his small voice, "and we want to listen."

Steve was horrified to feel tears burning the back of his eyes, but Nancy and Jonathan looked at him with such care that his embarrassment slowly withered away.

"Um," he started gruffly. "My parents are both gone for the holidays. My mom with her sister in Indianapolis and my dad with his..." He trailed off, not wanting to reveal his parents' business, but the way they were looking at him told him that they'd already guessed. "With his mistress," he finished, stumbling over the words. That was the first time he'd ever said that out loud. "So," he continued, "I went for a drive. And I remember passing by this house with this mom and dad and their two kids and there were Christmas decorations and they looked so happy. And then everything started to blur and I couldn't breathe and then I just stopped the car as soon as it seemed safe. And I guess that's where you found me. Did I pass out?" He was mortified.

"Steve, everything's fine," Nancy soothed, putting one of her hands on his. "I'm glad that you had enough sense to get yourself here." She didn't comment on the fact that Steve saw the Byers house as a safe place, somewhere his subconscious knew to take him when he was in trouble. "Has that happened before? The trouble breathing? Are you still having nightmares?"

Steve nodded, ashamed. He didn't deserve to have problems. Barely anything had happened to him. If anyone deserved to have problems it was the kids. God, they'd been through so much. The kids. They must think he'd abandoned them. He hadn't seen Will in weeks. And Dustin...

He snapped back to the present when Jonathan reached out and brushed at the skin under Steve's eye. His fingers came away

glistening with tears. Steve sucked in a sharp breath. The skin Jonathan had touched tingled. Steve looked at Jonathan with his eyes blown wide. He was too afraid to look at Nancy. What was that? Why did Jonathan do that? With Nancy sitting right there? What was going on?

Steve had spent enough time alone in the past month to properly agonize over his relationship (or lack thereof) with Nancy and Jonathan. Clearly he still loved Nancy. Who wouldn't? She was a firecracker of a woman and his first love, and she was still so clearly burned into his heart that he was surprised the whole town didn't notice. And Jonathan. Jonathan Byers. Steve had known deep down that he'd liked both boys and girls for years. He never told anyone, because who could he tell? He barely even admitted it to himself. The thought would make his head spin. What would the neighbors think?

But now, with Jonathan sitting in front of him, Steve's tear still shining on his finger, the whole thing seemed less terrifying. Fuck Hawkins, and fuck the backwards homophobes that lived in it, including his own fucking parents. This was Steve's life and he couldn't be afraid of doing what would make him happy. Not anymore. Fuck it all.

And with that, Steve summoned all the courage left in his tired, beat-down body and surged forwards to kiss Jonathan. Jonathan was still for so long that Steve started to think he'd completely misread the situation, that he just practically assaulted Jonathan right in front of his girlfriend, but then Jonathan's mouth moved against Steve's and all his thoughts flew out the window. Jonathan's lips were chapped and dry, but he tasted like cinnamon and minty toothpaste and Steve's heart was thumping so fast he thought it might give out.

After a moment Jonathan pulled back, and before Steve even got the chance to say a word Nancy was kissing him. Oh god, he'd almost forgotten what it felt like to be this close to Nancy. She was warm and slight against him, so unlike Jonathan's more solid frame, and her soft lips danced across his with a comforting familiarity. She pressed one more soft kiss to his mouth before sitting back, breathing hard.

Steve looked between the two of them. His brain was short-circuiting.

Steve Harrington was very rarely speechless, but when he opened his mouth nothing came out. He closed it again.

“Steve,” Nancy started instead, brushing a stray hair back into place. “In case that wasn’t obvious enough for you, Jonathan and I really like you. And we want you to be with us.” Steve gaped. This couldn’t be real.

“We’re sorry to spring this on you after everything that’s going on with you today but the fact that you came here, to my house, when you were in pain? That felt like a sign. And obviously Nancy has feelings for you, and I’ve practically been in love with you since the fifth grade.” Jonathan blushed and looked down. Steve felt an urge to touch his flushed cheeks.

“And we both want to help you with whatever’s going on with you,” Nancy continued. “We want to help you get better, and we want to be there for you and make up for how shitty we’ve been recently. You don’t deserve anything that’s been happening. You deserve happiness, Steve Harrington. And we want to try to help you get there.” By then Steve was full on crying, tears sliding down his face. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d cried like this. His eyes were burning and his breath was catching in his chest and his hands were shaking just a little.

“So,” Jonathan asked shyly, back to his bashful self. “What do you say?”

Fuck the town, fuck his parents, fuck everyone who ever had anything bad to say about him. Fuck stupid societal relationship norms and fuck everyone who’d ever made him hate himself for being attracted to boys and girls. And fuck the fucking demogorgons and the Upside Down for fucking over their lives. Steve was done doing what he thought other people wanted him to do, and he was done being alone.

“I say fuck yes,” he responded with a breathy laugh, and the words were barely out of his mouth before Nancy dragged him into a tight hug. She laughed against his shoulder, and he could feel her tears dripping down onto his t-shirt. And then Jonathan was there too, his warm chest pressed into Steve’s back, and he’d never felt so content

in his entire goddamn life. He relaxed into their touch and just let himself breathe. Everything would be alright.

Author's Note:

Every time I love a character I have to write a super angsty story about them being sad. So here's that. This is set before the Snow Ball but clearly after the events of this fic Steve, Nancy, and Jonathan are in a relationship so sadboi Steve probably chaperoned the dance with them. I also meant to incorporate the kiddos and Joyce but it felt too forced so I left it out. Oh well.